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## Vann's Death Loss To Vietnam, U. S.

One of the many tragedies of the Vietnam War has been the insistence of armchair generals in Washington that they, and not field commanders, call the shots.

Armchair generalship extended to the White House. Lyndon Johnson, at the height of the bombing during his administration, personally selected each bombing target. And the long-distance commanders have been wrong more often than not on the critical issue.

Middle- and upper middle-level officials, both military and civilian, have performed demonstrably better. Their decisions less clouded by domestic politics, these officials have been consistently more accurate in their estimates of communist activity and what it would take to counter enemy moves.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has been especially accurate. The Pentagon Papers showed how the CIA's accurate advice was ignored for political considerations.

One of the ablest sub-policy level officials in Vietnam has been John Vann.

Vann first went to Vietnam as an Army officer. Although a lieutenant colonel, Vann eventually resigned from the Army where his blunt views on the strategic and tactical aspects of the war were not appreciated by the more politically conscious officers.

Vann stayed in Vietnam as a State Department employee in the foreign aid program. He did not temper his views and would air them to anyone who would listen.

Vann was not a dove. He believed the war was worth fighting and could be won.

He did not like the way it was being waged. As senior U. S. adviser in the critical Vietnamese Central Highlands he encouraged the Vietnamese to do their own thing. He was one of the very few senior U. S. officials who privately believed South Vietnam could blunt and turn the North Vietnamese offensive.

Vann's personal heroism was legendary, both as a military man and as a civilian. He went where the action was, regardless of the danger involved. He saw for himself rather than trusting second- or third-hand reports.

It was on such a fact-finding mission that Vann, 48, was killed last Friday night. His helicopter crashed, killing him and two U. S. Army men.

It was a great loss, both for Vietnam and the United States. We needed this kind of tough-minded realist to counteract the political fluff that so often passes for judgment.